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THE ECONOMIC LAST OILING – LIFE CAPITAL

ECONOFICTION CAPITAL, LIFE CAPITAL, MARXISM, NEOLIBERALISM, PERFORMANCE, PSYCHOPATH

Baudrillard speaks of life as a process of accumulation, which is subject to an increasingly quantitative valuation, especially in the course of the economization of science and biomedical techniques, whereby the transition from life to life capital has indeed succeeded. As Baudrillard writes in *The Symbolic Exchange and Death*, everyone now carries their own little scheme of life, their life expectancy and even a life contract in their pocket, and thus apparently has a social claim to a certain quality of life. The gift of life as a process of accumulation is primarily to be understood as the gift of labor, which in capitalism now literally mutates into a crowned way of life. To this, capital adds the imaginary delusion as a supplement, namely to be able to identify oneself completely with one's individual interests in life in order to make oneself, as Baudrillard says, the capitalist accountant of one's own life. However, imaginary power is not only inscribed in the subject as a form of the will to survive, as Baudrillard assumes, but is realized as the economized hyper-reality principle, the most successful application of which consists of integrating work, which is financialized at best, into the design of life, which in turn is spelled out through work, which now has to be social and creative at the drop of a hat. The wages received in return for the work or the returns achieved must of course be spent again, which only releases another form of work in consumption. If not only work but also leisure coagulates into an investment that is inconceivable without permanent mobilization, then we can indeed speak of a life capital, an accumulating general mobilization that cannot be separated from survival and whose ultimate purpose is to postpone death for as long as possible.

The price of the accumulation of life as a positive value finds its correlate in the killing of death as a final solution to life – something that must ultimately erase the enigmatic nothingness of death. For Baudrillard, the separation of life and death indicates life in terms of survival, with needs that must be satisfied in order to sustain life, which in turn must be read simultaneously in the operative terms of calculation and capitalization. Harney/Moten speak of a self-improving and simultaneously self-accumulating individual who deploys and

constantly improves his property in the form of the properties of the self, while at the same time setting them as absolute. [1] And this in turn requires forms and institutions of prevention against death, an extensive arsenal of safety precautions ranging from life insurance to social security to medicine, in order to turn the human being, as the corona pandemic has compellingly shown, into a beefsteak in the plastic wrap of the home office, and at the same time a working mannequin that can only temporarily escape in creative work or in the use of products in consumption, only to be fixed again, most frequently today in front of the home screen, in front of which the worker is then mercilessly degraded to a user. We feel safe because we are already dead. For Baudrillard, this is the secret of security, like a steak under cellophane: surrounding yourself with a sarcophagus to prevent you from dying. We see a living corpse enmeshed in the technologized panic of life, wanting to enjoy it as a financialized success, diluting the former finality of death, infiltrated by this all too obvious fear of death that keeps the body intact as a final refusal of its own necessary demise. After the living human being, who is confusingly similar to the undead, the dead body is nothing at all. The rejection of death amounts to the death of death. This places us in the carcass of death, which is skinned and twisted into a Möbius strip. (Shipley 2021: 11) We thus codify death and then kill it.

Baudrillard devotes much of his writing to the medical and technological processing of death, the capitalization of death, corpses as stuffed simulacra, and the virtuality and repression of death, which is to be understood as a tranquilizer of the social, so that the radical otherness of death can be eliminated.

The last man living in the age of post-humanism, a monster that goes far beyond Nietzsche's concept of the last man, who in his insatiability not only wants to have everything, but also wants to have it immediately, lives completely arrived in the expandable chewing gum time of the present and therefore future income, which he has to speculate on today, can only half compensate him for the additional enjoyment he has missed out on as a result, as this seemingly coincides with his existence. However, the last person must continue to speculate on the future in the course of discounting, with which his expected future income is discounted down to his current existence value. This means that the value of life to be realized in the future, or to put it another way, the future performance lifetime value, by no means loses its significance, but life remains tied to present value and current enjoyment at the same time. It is really only a matter of time before the future income streams of an infant are estimated and then the expected income streams are discounted to obtain exactly the initial price of the infant. It is therefore no coincidence that the French business association is proposing to assign a VAT number to every French person from birth.

As a living financial asset, the last human being is a relation that possesses a material carrier or an underlying value that has a temporal relationship to the speculative value, namely to a performance lifetime value oriented towards the future, which *sui generis* pushes for monetary increase and the corresponding enjoyment of more – the living financial asset is a surplus fold that has no other choice but to unfold in terms of its performance and monetization potential. The “human capital” created in this way – as a mode of subjectivation – follows less the utilitarian logic of commodity exchange than a process of “asset appreciation”, with the person itself functioning as the universal asset. In the future, every

need, every desire and especially every behaviour will give rise to institutionalized, punctual and punctuated quantifications and assessments, to manifold evaluations and ratings – the last person will have to relate to these assessments and improve them in his future, and ultimately he will be divided into components that serve to optimize or efficiently increase the small ego capital x . Life monetized in this way, which is assigned a performance lifetime value without ifs and buts, is therefore a spread that is constantly monitored by the individual and by the institutions of the economy and the state.

The performance lifetime value thus refers to an underlying value, the currently priced life, which is to be regarded as an investment, i.e. on which an investment contract is to be written with a view to the monetary efficiency of future life, and on whose fluctuations eager and enthusiastic speculation is to be made in order to fulfill the speculation. And it is imperative for everyone to endure these waves and worlds of speculation; what is more, one must not only follow speculation and its dictates, one should ideally also out-shape them.

As is well known, wage labour today only has glamour when it is under the dominance of creativity, whose barely recognizable use value is increasingly stimulated by the exchange value of the potential and capacities of the creative, which want to be constantly updated. In the course of speculation, analogous to the capitalization of financial capital, subjectivity itself mutates into a self-valorizing financial investment, giving wings to possessive individualism. The speculative form of capital is the new movement of both the boundlessness of capital and the creativity or subjectivity of the last human being.

In addition to performance lifetime value, attention must now be paid to customer lifetime value (CLV). To determine this, companies operating in traditional consumer goods markets use their customers' personal data to calculate the amount of money they will pay to the company over their entire consumer lifetime. A high CLV then guarantees the customer a range of additional services from the company, such as discounts, upgrades, personal hotline contacts and other special services, while a customer with a low CLV must nonetheless endure a grueling consumer life on hold.

All kinds of companies (fashion companies, mobile phone providers, credit card companies, hotel chains, airlines, car dealers, etc.) now keep comprehensive databases on the consumer behavior of each individual customer, often enough passing on the personal data to special analysis companies so that they can evaluate and weight the data and calculate individual customer lifetime values from it. These are profiles based on thousands of individual pieces of information. The marketing service provider Zeta Global, for example, the latest start-up company of former Apple and Pepsi boss John Sculley, sells profiles based on more than 2,500 individual pieces of information for 700 million people. Financially strong customers in particular are lured into further consumption with targeted offers based on their exceptionally good profiles, and some analysts even go so far as to claim that the addition of the customer lifetime values of all a company's customers best documents its true future prospects, making the customer lifetime value as important as the company's share price. It can be assumed that most people in the USA today who have at least a bank account and a cell phone contract can call several different CLVs their own, without really knowing it. And the more one travels, stores and goes out, i.e. climbs up the ladder of the all-round consumer, the more CLVs one owns, as if assigned by an invisible hand, most of which one does not know oneself; at best,

one notices that as one's CLV increases, companies feverishly try to offer one a series of perks, such as a more attractive credit card, expensive replacement cars or a better class on airplanes.

"Overcapital" would now be understood as a form of capital that is created on the basis of scoring, grading and ranking methods and that is algorithmically assigned to individuals. We can think of supercapital as consisting of all the digital information available about a person and encompassing the entirety of their relationships, which are determined by digital traces and organized and made traceable by scoring and ranking methods. Those who diligently accumulate it gain advantages such as better prices, better services, more attention and a higher position on the markets. Increasingly, the market is looking at people from the inside, measuring their physical and emotional states and observing how they move around their homes, offices or shopping centers. This is driving companies away from (even highly targeted) advertising towards a model that dynamically classifies people and in which their existing classification situation enables further diverse applications in the future.

Back to the performance lifetime value. In order to successfully monetize life with the help of a singular performance, one's own activities must be permanently leveraged, and this also means that the connections to other people are designed in such a way that one always gets back more in traffic with them than one puts in as an investment towards them. This is a way of enjoying more that is based on profitable competitive behavior.

This way of applying the calculation of capital to one's own life (and that of others) requires a determined and success-oriented performance in social networks, among others, and then offers a surplus above all to those who manage to accumulate reputations, performance values and references that are somehow related to self-enhancement, always taking care to reduce the uncertainty of connection decisions that affect the surplus. In this way, leverage becomes a way of giving the projections of the ego a self-fulfilling, performative quality. It can by no means be ruled out that the capacity to successfully master one's own risks becomes a danger to others. Moreover, the imperative to achieve super performance for one's own life requires the denunciation of underperforming individuals and, at best, their replacement by an identical twin of super performance. If this form of risk processing particularly affects the elites and larger parts of the academic middle class, life for the low-income population continues to insist on being a process of permanent indebtedness, which ultimately does not even close the future, but in a specific way even opens it, because lenders no longer consider the income of borrowers, which serves as the basis for lending, only in terms of the probability of being able to repay loans, but in terms of the possibility and potential of being able to service payments at all in the future. In this way, even the lives of indebted proletarians are geared towards the creation of a monetary surplus for financial capital.

The "value" of the last human being is not simply a conglomerate of characteristics such as competence, performance, qualification, health, efficiency, knowledge, relationship osmosis, creativity, desires, ability to work, etc., but all these characteristics must be constantly and effectively treated by the last human being with a view to their capitalization in the future, without the desire to enjoy everything immediately disappearing even in the slightest. All this can only be achieved by implementing a certain rationality of performance, which is, however, indistinguishable from irrationality. Rationality here refers not only to the motives and

preferences of the subject, but also to the enforceability of promises to pay, to the potential to become a creditor, which forces the most profitable actions possible, but which are just as compatible with irrational individuals as with highly talented stock market traders, who themselves often enough trade with “noise” rather than “information”. Such rationality, which results from the capitalization of everything and everyone, resembles the market behaviour of addicts, whose survival, however, remains tied to the availability of certain resources.

The hour of a new social character is now definitely upon us, namely that of the functional psychopath who works tirelessly on himself, or it would be better to say that he tirelessly performs in the medium of a quasi-sporting practice the increase of his psychomoneary capital, which is considered the preferred resource of his excess of authenticity, which leads to a constantly monetized concern for himself, or, if you want to put it another way, to a happy suturing of an entropic high-energy support with himself. If, within this framework, the fight for one's own career becomes more and more athletic, burnout is the limit for the increase in behavior. The functional psychopath is someone for whom the system fits like a Hugo Boss suit, and when he freaks out, it is only to take the immanence of the system itself to the extreme, or to put it another way: He is someone who is fundamentally affirmative towards the system, but also likes to try to trick it from time to time by living out his eccentricity in an incredibly creative and brutally egomaniacal way at the same time, but ultimately remains so quiet that the ultimately strangely tame transgression of the rules harms the other person, but in no way harms the system. The functional psychopath is a ‘castrated’ psychopath.

However, it should not be confused with the clinical image of the psychopath, although the representatives of the ruling class (managers, lawyers, brokers, politicians, doctors, etc.) sometimes come dangerously close to this image. Psychologist Götz Eisenberg's observation that most psychopaths today are by no means imprisoned in psychiatric wards, but rather roam the streets freely and, to their (mis)fortune, are able to demonstrate the successes they themselves celebrate in their respective professions, can certainly be endorsed. (Eisenberg 2019) Functional psychopaths usually operate hyper-efficiently in their everyday lives and in their jobs and possess characteristics such as unconditional focus and an exaggerated egocentricity, as well as an incessant tendency to optimize their own selfishness, which ranges from subtle profiling artistry to murderous ruthlessness, they mobilize the sympathy of others as their very own privilege, which serves purely to optimize their own profits and the endless pursuit of singularity, which in turn is cobbled together from the offerings of the marketing industry for those with higher incomes; they live dishonesty, corruption and imperious behavior to the hilt, while remaining a versatile and experimental personality, all supposedly in a frenzy of complete spontaneity.

In the flow of affirmative at-risk being, the functional psychopath has to accumulate success events non-stop, while those who lose in the game of at-risk being merely accumulate disappointments and therefore end up in depression or even try to run amok in a short circuit. On the other hand, the life of the functional psychopath could also be understood as a long-term rampage that does not require a bloody scenario to prove its catastrophic effects on the lives of others. If one were to follow Adorno, the functional psychopath would be an egocrat who successfully performs impudence in the long run. The life thus set up for success and thus authenticated feigns itself as a means of training autistic sociopathy and is entirely

subordinated to the function of the efficiency of the “ego itself”, an ego that, however, remains affected (affected and subjected) by the real subsumption under capital in a double sense, and thus subsumed, life is a single movement forward and at the same time an oceanic catastrophe that extends to the fusion of the ego with the functionalization of the brain for the purposes of capital.

For better or worse, the functional psychopath must achieve differential success, which is constantly evaluated, assessed and rewarded on various markets, in order to be rated even better and to rise in the rankings, and no individual act of singularization is sufficient for this, because this usually requires intensive networking (with which success and reputation are constantly checked and tested), so that the authenticity performance cripple can mature “under supervision” into the functional psychopath that the economy of capitalization expects. The psychopath we are referring to is a functional psychopath who remains connected to the team and algorithmic machines in the company, whose task it is to process the desired and to be optimized behavioral modifications and to use them profitably for capital, i.e. to subordinate behavior entirely to economic goals, whereby behavioral norms such as conformity and conformity are by no means sought, but rather outright cynicism and opportunism.

Seen in this light, the functional psychopath energetically and endlessly copulates with his desires in order to finally coagulate into a living consumption machine that completes the usurpation of the leisure-labor man by the capital apparatus. Through my talent for cleverness, through my yoga, through my penchant for French wine and through the excellent singular Thai food, through my gender behavior and that of my friends, through my successful career at Deutsche Bank, I gain self-complexity and become special, but the special is precisely a product of the general, so that the special ones can almost be smelled, more than two of them appear in their trendy restaurants or bars, where they ultimately do not curate the offer, but are curated and controlled by the offer, are made creative in their consumption by one module fitting into another, the food, the drink, the designer women, the ambience and the self. The functional psychopath appears as the gang leader of himself, who receives orders from the unconscious to win, whatever the cost, and from whose face recognition shines when he speaks for the many that he himself is. The more the subject has organized his life around himself in this way, the more perfectly he represents the systemic logic. There is now a conjunction of desire and system, and its metamorphoses are associated with the greatest pleasure.

The functional psychopath thus unintentionally confirms the undeniable truth that economic capitalization has long since overtaken any form of cultural appreciation, so that even the most extraordinary and scandalous cultural value gesture cannot make up for a lack of capitalization. The hard school of capitalization incessantly imposes the imperative on the functional psychopath not to become economically and performatively impoverished under any circumstances.

The functional psychopath glides uninterruptedly, restlessly glued to his smartphone, into absolute subjectivity and thus mobilizes his final addiction to the motor skills of digital technologies. Intelligent machines produce the most positive prediction products possible for him in the short term, calculating exactly what he has to do in the near future. He is compelled

to reach for his smartphone, which transfers his restlessness to the attention spans of the functional psychopath. His delusion resembles a telephone system with thirteen smartphones. Anyone who can't or doesn't want to keep up is first thoroughly embarrassed and then psychologically executed. However, those who can use their social media charm to persuade others to do what they themselves want, who make quick decisions and use their lack of commitment to weld themselves completely to the success of their company and their team colleagues, while also succeeding in auctioning off this type of disinhibition and connection as particularly cool on the attention markets, are clever. In the future, you will have to add a psychopathy check to your application documents, which should of course be positive, so that you can then win the race in the job interview according to the rules of a mechanical casting procedure in order to outdo the ego porn, which is equal to small capital x, as much as possible in the future.

[1] "The endless improvement of man, in which necessity is enforced as absolute contingency, is fixated in European thought on the malignant apprehension of its objects, including itself. The historical unfolding of this fixation on fix(ing), the murderous interplay of appropriation and improvement, is given in and as the violence of self-improvement in self-accumulation vis-à-vis everything that shows itself in the rendezvous of differentiation, incompleteness and affectation. The ever-changing activity of what appears to what appears as the self as the continuous dismantling of the idea of the self itself and its eternally prospective perfection-in-improvement can only be answered, from the myopic and impossible perspective of the self, with a repugnant combination of regulation and accumulation" (Harney/Moten 2022: 56-57). Talk of the self is paradoxical because there would have to be a person who possesses the self, and this would mean imagining a self behind the self. The self cannot be in the person either, because this would treat the time relation of a dynamic process as if it were an object or a static object. Self-modeling thus refers to self-accumulation, which dynamically combines different parts and dimensions into an impossible unity of identification, which is then referred to as "I".

translated by deepL.

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